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ABSTRACT

A course in children's literature for prospective elementary school teaches used two new educational strategies: first, the basis of the course was a set of performance-based instructional modules; second, the overall style of the class was similar to a modified open classroom approach. Each student was asked to complete at least one performance-based module for each of ten areas of children's literature. Each individual module included a stated behavioral objective, a list of proposed activities, reference materials, and evaluation experiences. Class activities included group discussions, demonstrations, and small-group activities. Each student was asked to keep a journal of his responses to each piece of reading done. A teacher-made objective test on children's literature was administered to the students at the end of the term. The mean score was 80 percent. Subjective evaluation by students, which included analysis of journal entries and an attitude test, indicated a positive reaction to the course and to the use of instructional modules. (Several sample modules are included.) (RT)

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Feasibility of Instructional Modules in Teaching Children's Literature (ED 325C) to Undergraduate Students

by
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This is an interim report on a research study designed and conducted by Dr. Cianciolo Professor and assisted by Mrs. Joan Trezise, Graduate Instructor.

I. INTRODUCTION

As is true of other endeavors to improve educational programs for prospective teachers, children's literature specialists are taking a number of different approaches. One of these is an attempt to do more in the way of individualizing instruction by emphasizing the affective response to literature. In other words, is it possible to find ways of presenting a study of children's literature in a more individualized way? Also, educators in all fields are today focusing more than ever on performance objectives. That is, can goals in children's literature classics be stated more precisely and in behavioral terms?

In order to pursue these questions further and in more depth, a study was undertaken during the Winter Term at Michigan State University to determine the feasibility of using performance-based modules in the teaching of children's literature. Scholarly modes of knowledge were used to provide a more individualized approach to the subject, and these were combined with experimental class activities based on some concepts of the open classroom approach to teaching. The objectives of the course, then, were presented in terms of performance objectives providing each individual with a variety of choices and alternatives.

The philosophy and procedures which would typify this study of the feasibility of the modular approach to teaching children's literature to "undergraduates at Michigan State University reflect the author's knowledge and experience in teaching children's literature on the college level, multiple resources and media in this subject area, children's responses to literature, application of a modified open classroom approach to teaching, and general concepts underlying individualized instruction.

II. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Certain basic assumptions were an intrinsic part of this study:

1. Considering the great span of individual differences among students, the most effective educational programs attempt to individualize instruction.

2. Since individual response is an essential aspect of education in the area of literature, a modified open classroom approach in a course in children's literature must be considered highly appropriate, since in an open situation, students are encouraged to respond to what they read and experience in individualistic ways.

3. Since it must be considered true that individual learning styles vary from individual to individual, and that different individuals learn best from various types of media, educational programs that employ a multi-media approach must be more effective.

4. In attempting to evaluate any educational program, it is of a particular importance that the students themselves be included in the evaluation process.

5. Since the modular approach to instruction focuses on individualizing learning, and since individual responses are particularly appropriate to literature programs, the modular approach to children's literature is appropriate.

6. Since educational programs can be generally improved if instructors attempt to focus more indirectly on goals and objectives, a course in children's literature that is written in performance terms and which has definitely stated goals will thereby be more effective.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Education 325C, called Children's Literature at Michigan State University, is required of all elementary education majors, and it was in this course that the educational strategies described in this paper were undertaken. Two basic strategies were used: First, the basis of the course was a set of performance-based instructional modules which were derived originally by Dr. Patricia Cianciolo and then others were added through the combined efforts of others involved in teaching of children's literature at Michigan State University, namely Dr. Jean LePere, Mrs. Gloria Blatt and Mrs. Joan Treziso. Second, the overall style of the class in which the modules were used might be described as similar, in some ways, to a modified open classroom approach. That is, class sessions were fairly informal, student participation and interaction were encouraged, activities and projects were stressed, the teacher role was that of a resource person, and individual learning styles were taken into account as much as possible.

III. METHODOLOGY

Subjects: One class composed of twenty-six Michigan State University juniors and seniors who were majors in Elementary Education were selected through the standard university enrollment procedures. These students had no previous background in the subject of children's literature other than their own personal childhood reading.

Modules: Each student was asked to complete at least one performance-based module for each of the following ten areas of children's literature: realistic fiction, picture books, historical fiction, biography, informational, folklore, fantasy, motivational, and interpretative activities, and history and the classics. Each individual module included a stated behavioral objective; a list of proposed activities under the heading of experience; reference materials; and evaluation experiences. The following is a sample module:

I.

OBJECTIVES:	To be able to recognize the theme of a book and realize that it may or may not be acceptable to the reader, to gain skill in guiding children's study of literature, especially the identification and appraisal of theme.
EXPERIENCE:	Read aloud a book to a group of children in grade four or beyond, help the children to identify the theme(s) of the book and ask them to evaluate that message. Discussions or written statements may be the means by which the children can present their thoughts about the theme of the book. Any other appropriate book may be selected.
MATERIALS:	Any well written modern realistic fiction, historical fiction or biography (See bibliographies in ED 325C packet for specific suggestions for each genre).
LEVEL:	Grades 5-8
EVALUATION:	Teacher candidate's report will include a statement of the book's theme, as well as quotes that the children made during their discussions or written statements about the theme's acceptability, significance.

II.

OBJECTIVE:	To differentiate between literature for adults and literature for children.
EXPERIENCE:	Read one of the following books. In light of the book's content, style, or theme, discuss the age range that would most likely

enjoy and more fully benefit from reading it. State specifically why you designated the reading audience as you did.

MATERIALS: Huck and Kuhn, Children's Literature in the Elementary School, Second Edition, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, pgs. 28-36. Anglund, Joan Walsh, Spring is a New Beginning; Cleaver, Vera and Bill, Ellen Grae; Cunningham, Julia, Drop Dead; Picard, Barbara, One is One; Ipcar, Dahlov, General Felice. Other appropriate books.

LEVEL: All grades

EVALUATION: Students highlight how each of the books cited does or does not comply with what Huck and Kuhn say most children will like or understand in terms of a book's content, style, or theme.

III.

OBJECTIVE: To develop criteria for evaluating historical fiction as a type of literature for children.

EXPERIENCE: Read at least one historical fiction novel. Evaluate the selection in terms of how well it exemplifies each of the characteristics of historical fiction as a broad type of literature.

MATERIALS: Any historical fiction novel for children (e.g. One is One by Barbara Picard, So Ends the Day by James Forman, Carolina's Courage by Elizabeth Yates, and Voices in the Night by Rhoda Bachmeister).

LEVEL: Grades 3-4, Grades 5-8

EVALUATION: Aspects in evaluation of selection will include blend of history and fiction to permit readers to view past as something vital, dramatic and significant. Reader's interest must focus on historical period, person, or event. Action must be realistic and evoke emotional identification. Historical details must be factually accurate.

IV.

OBJECTIVE: To recognize more fully the various styles of art used to illustrate children's books. To appraise the appropriateness of each of these styles for use in children's books.

EXPERIENCE: Examine numerous picture books. In each case try to identify the style of art used by the artist. Appraise the selection of that style of art as an appropriate means to reflect the theme, action, and/or mood of the story, and appraise the effectiveness of the artist's use of the style of art.

MATERIALS: Illustrations in Children's Books by Patricia J. Cianciolo, Wm. Brown Publishing Company, 1970, and various illustrated books.

LEVEL: All grades

EVALUATION: Various styles of art will be identified. Each will be appraised as to appropriateness for use in children's picture books. (The various styles of art used to illustrate children's books include: photographs, impressionism, expressionism, cubism, pontillism, cartoon art, representational art, collage, and folk art styles.)

These performance-based modules provides a set of goals which were identified and accomplished by the students. They were designed to satisfy a wide diversity of expectations and interests of a heteregeneous class of prospective teachers. They included both cognitive responses as well as the affective. The cognitive responses were to be somehow arbitrary single, while the affective responses were to be personal and individual in nature.

Instructor: The instructor viewed her role in the class as a facilitator for helping the students to experience children's literature. She served as a discussion leader with the class as a whole and in small groups. An attempt was made to develop a rapport with students that would be a model for prospective teachers to emulate in their dealings with their own students. In essence, the instructor tried to demonstrate the teaching of children's literature to a class of prospective teachers who would, in turn, adopt these methods in their own teaching experience. (A more detailed description of the particular role of the instructor may be obtained by reading "The Example is Vitally Important!" Which appeared in the Spring 1971 edition of English Education.)

Classroom Activities: Classroom activities were conducted in an open and free way with the encouragement of individual response and pursuits. Group discussions were generally designed to allow the free flow of ideas among the students with common learnings occurring through an inductive method.

General class discussions always were based on children's books, with both the instructor and the students contributing specific examples. Films were used to enhance group activity in the area of picture books, information books, folklore, and poetry. A resource person spoke to the group on the subject of censorship. The instructor

demonstrated methods of leading a discussion with children and encouraging the creative writing of poetry.

Small group activities were used many times. Students gathered in small groups to share their reading with each other. They also met in pairs to interview each other and prepare biographies written in the style of a children's biography. Groups were also formed to formulate plans for the motivational and interpretative activity modules as a cooperative effort. These modules were then presented to the group as a whole by the small groups.

Student Responsibilities: Each student was asked to keep a journal of his responses to each piece of reading done. He was asked to respond in a personal way, much as he might request from his own students later on. Each person was also asked to respond to the class activities in which he had participated. In other words, students kept a running account of their own unique contributions to the class in terms of materials, presentations, and interactions. Following are a few examples of student's comments which appeared in their journals:

> I feel involved in the class as far as paying attention, absorbing and forming opinions about what is presented or said. For some reason, I am also able to articulate my ideas--usually I get nervous or embarrassed when I try to give an opinion in front of a group.
>
> I think it might be fun to do this biography of another student. I'm surprised because usually I'd probably just think it would be a pain.
>
> I was really disappointed in our small group today. Just surface talk. I didn't feel we really got down to the books.
>
> So many examples! For once I have a text with no assigned readings, and it's interesting!

Evaluation of Students: Each module was evaluated by the instructor in terms of the quality and depth of response. The journals were also evaluated according to the amount and quality of reading accomplished and the degree of involvement in other class activities. At the end of the term each student submitted a suggested grade for himself based on his module scores and the quality of his journal entries, along with a written self-evaluation in support of his evaluation. Only three students deviated

more than half a grade point from the instructor's evaluation. Thus, the student's seemed to have an awareness of their accomplishments in the class.

Materials: All forms of media were used to facilitate the learning of children's literature. The modules employed the use of tapes; filmstrips, records, video tapes, magazine articles, and children's books. These materials were made available to the students in three ways: they were presented to the entire group in general class sessions, were used by small groups and individuals in their efforts to complete various modules.

IV. RESULTS

Evaluation: Evaluation procedures were focused on several aspects: First an attempt was made to determine how successful the class had been in relaying a certain body of information concerning children's literature across to the students. Second, students were asked to give subjective evaluations concerning the use of the modules and general classroom procedures. Third, the students' attitudes toward the modules and the class were measured.

In regard to the first question concerning evaluation, a teacher-made objective test traditionally used in children's literature classes at Michigan State was administered to the students at the end of the term. The scores obtained by the students were not used as a basis for their final grade, so no pressure was exerted upon them to prepare in advance for the test. The students were not told they would be given the test until the last day of class, when it was administered. The instrument consisted of sixty-five multiple choice questions, and a total of 26 students took the test. Scores were derived on the basis of percentage correct; thus, a person scoring 61 correct answers received a score of 94 percent. The scores ranged from 94 to 62 percent. The median percentage of the 26 scores was 82 percent. The mean score was 80 percent. It can be said, then, if 70 percent were to be considered the passing grade, all but six class members received a passing score on this test.

In regard to the second question, concerning evaluation in terms of students' responses to the modules and class procedures, the journals were used. Statements were excerpted from students' journals which expressed specific reactions to these areas. Some representative quotations are as follows:

> My reason for evaluating the modules as worthwhile is that through the process of doing them I became more aware of criteria for "good" children's literature. I looked, compared, thought out perceived things through doing the module work.
>
> Most of what I learned started with discussion in the class and then was backed up by themmodules.
>
> The circular seating arrangement of our class is nice, for it helps me to participate in class. It is great to have the opportunity to react to ideas which are new and sometimes disturbing.
>
> I really enjoy looking at all of these different books. When everyone brings something to class, I think we all benefit from this experience.
>
> On the whole, I can say I enjoyed doing the modules. The major value of the modules was that the objectives gave a purpose to our reading so that we had something to look for and to comment on.

In addition, at the conclusion of the term, students were given a rating scale concerning the modules. Four statements were used to obtain student reactions:

1. The modules were interesting to do.
2. Their objectives were clear.
3. They motivated me to read and evaluate children's books.
4. I recommend that they be retained as a part of this course.

Students rated the statements on the basis of a Likert-type scale: strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neigher agree or disagree (N), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

The students' responses to these items were:

1. The modules were interesting to do.
   - SA -------- 42%
   - A -------- 50%
   - N -------- 3%
   - D -------- 0%
   - SD -------- 0%

2. The modules were clear.
   SA -------- 32%
   A -------- 54%
   N -------- 15%
   D -------- 0%
   SD -------- 0%

3. They motivated me to read and evaluate children's books.
   SA -------- 54%
   A -------- 23%
   N -------- 15%
   D -------- 8%
   SD -------- 0%

4. I recommend that they be retained as a part of this course.
   SA -------- 42%
   A -------- 35%
   N -------- 13%
   D -------- 0%
   SD -------- 0%

Thus, it can be seen that on the basis of these four items to which the students were asked to respond, their responses were overwhelmingly on the positive side. Only in response to item three did any students express any degree of negativism at all, and even the percentages of neutral responses were small.

In order to determine the students' over-all attitude toward the course in general and children's literature (and related topics) in particular, a twelve-item phrase-completion instrument was designed, and the students were asked to complete the instrument on the last day of class. The twelve items on the instrument are as follows:

1. Children's Literature is
2. Art work in children's books is
3. Instruction modules are
4. Children's poetry is
5. Picture books are
6. Language in children's books is
7. Education 325C is
8. Options or choices of study areas are
9. Children's books are
10. "Good" books for children are
11. Getting children to read is
12. Children's authors are

The students were instructed to write down the first thought that came to their minds in regard to each of the items.

Three judges were chosen to evaluate the results of this instrument.* One of the judges is Director of School Libraries in the Lansing, Michigan, public schools two are

*Miss Mildred Nickel, Mr. Martin Kangas, and Mr. Leverne South

educational consultants in the Michigan Department of Education. Each judge was asked to rate each student's response to each of the items in terms of whether he believed the response to indicate that the student strongly agreed with the item, agreed, was neutral to it, disagreed, strongly disagreed, or did not complete it (although the students had been asked not to skip any items). The judges' evaluations of the students' responses were then averaged, so that the percentage figures listed below indicate the collective judgments of the three judges in regard to the items. In other words, when the students were asked to complete the phrase "children's literature is...", according to the three judges, 56 percent of the students responded very positively, 30 percent responded positively, 13 percent responded in a neutral way, 0 percent responded negatively, 1 percent responded very negatively, and 0 percent did not respond at all. The data listed below summarize these results.

	VP	MP	N	MN	VN	NR
1.	56%	30%	13%		17%	
2.	45%	44%	11%			
3.	29%	42%	20%	8%	1%	
4.	33%	44%	11%	57%		2%
5.	50%	37%	7%	5%	1%	
6.	24%	42%	24%	8%		2%
7.	42%	50%	6%	2%		
8.	32%	36%	18%	5%	1%	8%
9.	35%	47%	10%			9%
10.	32%	40%	27%	1%		
11.	54%	23%	19%	14%		
12.	42%	32%	20%	2%		4%
Averages:	40%	40%	16%	4%	0%	2%

It can be seen, then, when the individual percentages are considered, as well as the averages of these, according to the three judges' judgments, the students in the class responded strongly on the positive side, which indicates that when the instructional modules are used in an approach to a children's liteature course, a group of students seem to have a strongly positive attitude toward both the course itself and children's literature. Considered on the whole, 40 percent of the students reacted <u>very</u> positively to the items, and 40 percent responded positively. While 16 percent reacted in a neutral way, perhaps this indicates more that some of the items tended to evoke neutral responses more than either positive or negative responses -- a fault more of the item

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING STATEMENT

In summary, it can be said that all of the evaluation techniques used in this study indicated that when behavior-based instructional modules are used as a basis for class instruction, the results are very strongly on the positive side.

The purpose of this study which was conducted during Winter Term at Michigan State University was to ascertain the feasibility of using instructional modules in children's literature class, and it is to be hoped that some of the strategies used in this study can be applied to children's literature classes in general. This Spring Term, the same methods and procedures are being used with another group, and more specific data will be gathered concerning individual patterns of behavior, attitudes, and achievement. This, then, is in the nature of an interim report on the initial research. The final report should be available by June 15th, 1971. It is in this report that the correlations between each evaluation instrument will be made, that is their correlation when viewed for individual students and with the group as a whole

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